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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000591

DEPT FOR SE GRATION, S/USSES, AF A A/S CARTER, AF/C  
NSC FOR MGAVIN AND HUDSON  
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN  
ADDIS ABABA ALSO FOR USAU

SENSITIVE  
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SUBJECT: CHADIAN REBELS STILL FEAR ARMY OFFENSIVE, PLEDGE NOT TO  
STAND DOWN

REF: A) KHARTOUM 525  
B) KHAROTUM 212

11. (SBU) Summary: In a May 4 meeting in Khartoum, RFC Chadian Rebel Commander (and close associate of UFR President Timane Erdimi) Mahamat Hanno claimed that the Chadian Army remains poised to attack the Chadian rebels along the nebulous border region. Hanno backtracked on earlier assertions that the entire Chadian rebel force is inside Chad. He expressed great skepticism that the May 3 Doha Accord between Chad and Sudan would halt Chadian President Deby from launching an offensive, and dismissed the notion that pressure from the international community would dissuade him from doing so. Hanno chastised the USG for insisting that the rebels stand down while at the same time denying opportunities for political engagement, noting that UFR President Erdimi would welcome a phone conversation with USG officials in Washington. Erdimi is currently beset by communications difficulties, he said, but has the ability to make outbound calls. Poloffs provided the phone number of AF/C Director Wycoff, as previously agreed with AF/C. On May 5, a GOC spokesman accused the GOS of violating the Doha Accord and asserted that several armed columns were launched against Chad. UNAMID sources confirmed the presence of two Chadian rebel columns in Chadian territory 65 and 10km North East of Goz Beida (near Amdam) on May 5, but could not confirm any clashes. End Summary.

12. (SBU) Meeting with poloffs in Khartoum on May 4, Hanno asserted that the Chadian army is positioned to attack the Chadian rebels in the ill-defined border area. "N'Djamena is empty. They have sent all their forces toward the border," he claimed. "They will attack us sooner or later." Hanno remained doubtful that Deby would hold back his forces, despite the signing of the Doha Accord between the GOS and GOC on May 3. "He will not respect it. He will make his own calculations about what is in his best interests, and that's what he will act upon." Hanno further dismissed the possibility that international pressure could avert a pre-emptive GOC attack on the Chadian rebels, or persuade the GOC to cut off its support to JEM. In particular, USG leverage on the Chadian leader was limited, he said, because "Deby has never been received by you in Washington."

13. (SBU) Polchief pressed Hanno on the location of the Chadian rebel army, questioning whether the entire force had really crossed into Chad inside the Hajar al Marfein region, based on conflicting information from other reports. Back-tracking somewhat on his earlier assertions (Ref A), Hanno claimed that "there are 8,000 to 10,000 UFR fighters in Chad and all along the border areas," noting that the actual border was very nebulous. On May 5, the GOC accused the GOS of launching a military assault against Chad. "While the ink has yet to dry on the Doha accord, the Khartoum regime has just launched several armoured columns against our country," Communications Minister Mahamat Hissein, the government spokesman, was quoted in the press as saying on state radio. UNAMID sources confirmed to poloff the presence of two Chadian rebel columns in

Chadian territory 65 and 10km North East of Goz Beida (near Amdam), respectively. Each column is estimated to contain 60-70 vehicles. They are believed to have entered Chad on May 4.

(Note: Previously UNAMID sources had told poloff they were unable to verify the strength or locations of Chadian rebel forces with any degree of certainty, but noted there were unconfirmed reports on May 2 putting Chadian rebel groups in Sudanese territory, across the border opposite to the area between Adr and Toumtouma in Eastern Chad. UNMID sources also noted unconfirmed reports that Chadian Army forces at Adr were seen "on alert" as if preparing for an imminent rebel attack. Chadian army BMP-1 armored personnel carriers and BM-21 rocket launchers were reportedly observed exposed and ready for action. UNAMID received an unconfirmed report that a rebel advance team had attempted (and failed) to reach Abeche to destroy military aircraft there several days prior, but this rumor remains unsubstantiated. End Note.)

14. (SBU) Polchief reiterated to Hanno the USG's strong disapproval of any offensive action taken along the border by either GOC forces or Chadian rebels, and urged the Chadian rebels not to launch any attacks. "You cannot look at it like that," snapped Hanno. "They are ready to attack us. We can't just sit there and do nothing." He then chastised the international community, in particular the USG, for its perceived audacity in demanding the rebels stand down. "We've been asking you for over six months" to force Deby to engage with us politically, he said, noting the letter that URF President Erdimi sent to AF/C Director Wycoff (Ref B). "We prepared a delegation to send to Washington, but we never received an invite." He then posited that clashes between the Chadian Army and the rebels might spur a negotiated settlement. "Concurrent with the fighting, we can negotiate," he said.

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15. (SBU) Hanno said that UFR President Erdimi would welcome a call from USG officials in Washington, but was currently beset by communications difficulties; the Chadian rebels have self-imposed a ban on the use of Thuraya satellite phones, he said, over fears that the GOC (and the French) are eavesdropping on their conversations and using the phones to track rebel positions. "For the past three weeks, no one in the field has been using telephones," he said. While the Chadian rebels also possess rival Iridium satellite phones, these have apparently had technical difficulties; currently, those in the field with Iridium phones are unable to receive calls, and can only make outbound calls. Erdimi would be happy to make a call to Washington, he said, and poloffs agreed to explore the possibility in the coming days.

16. (SBU) Comment: In the midst of an ongoing Doha peace process and upcoming meetings with Special Envoy Gration in Khartoum, the GOS is likely opposed to a Chadian rebel offensive at this time. Hanno's abrupt return to Khartoum following the signing of the Doha Accord between Sudan and Chad could well be indicative of this. For his part, Hanno denied that the GOS requested his return to Khartoum or had passed any messages instructing the Chadian rebels to defer offensive action. SLM-MM leader Minni Minnawi told CDA Fernandez late on May 5 that Chadian-supported JEM rebel units had just attacked his positions in Muzbat and Furawiya in North Darfur so it is clear that the border area remains extremely volatile.

FERNANDEZ